



Chapter 9: Children Who Witness Domestic Violence Recommendations

*The impact of domestic and sexual violence on children is a common theme that has emerged throughout all sections of the recommendations. Children who live in a home where domestic violence is occurring are 50% more likely to be abused themselves. Equally detrimental are the life long developmental consequences that children suffer who live in a home with domestic violence. In 1999, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges published the resource guide *Effective Interventions in Domestic Violence and Child Maltreatment Cases: Guidelines for Policy and Practice*, better known as "The Green Book". The Green Book is a framework for communities to utilize in developing solutions to the complex issues surrounding domestic violence and child maltreatment. The recommendations in this section fall into three distinct categories of child protective services (CPS), domestic relations, and victim services.*

Recommendations

Children Who Witness Domestic Violence

The primary goal for most child welfare agencies first and foremost is to ensure child safety. However, research has revealed that domestic violence is also present in a majority of child maltreatment cases. CPS is uniquely positioned to intervene when these two issues overlap with the intent that keeping victims of domestic violence safe from abuse is also a key indicator in the ability to keep kids safe from abuse and neglect.

Child Protective Services (CPS)

Children Who Witness Domestic Violence - CPS: 9.1

Develop screening and assessment procedures and train staff to identify and respond to domestic violence in order to promote family safety and abuser accountability.

Currently, there is no standard form to assess for domestic violence in CPS cases. Given that the co-occurrence of these two issues is high, it is critical to get the entire family assistance and resources to effectively address the domestic violence issues. Therefore, procedures and training must be developed to screen for domestic violence in order to ensure appropriate case plans are developed and referrals are made.

Children Who Witness Domestic Violence - CPS: 9.2

Encourage collaborations between domestic violence programs, child protective services, child welfare agencies, health care agencies and juvenile courts to develop new joint service models for families experiencing domestic violence and child maltreatment.

Service providers need to better coordinate to address the needs of families experiencing domestic violence and child maltreatment. Some options to achieve better coordination include: (1) joint case consultations, and (2) co-location of services. One current program operating in the juvenile courts provides mothers access to domestic violence advocates and is the first program in Arizona to proactively screen and make services available to mothers with CPS cases.



Victims may be fearful about disclosing domestic violence or sexual abuse in the presence of the abuser. Also, an abuser can continue to exert his power and control tactics over the victim in these settings, making any attempt at intervention ineffective. Therefore, policies and protocols need to be developed to minimize situations where victims are required to be face-to-face with their abuser.

**Children Who Witness
Domestic Violence - CPS:
9.3**

Encourage service providers, child welfare agencies, CPS, and dependency courts to minimize the use of potentially dangerous or inappropriate interventions in cases of domestic violence that place victims face-to-face with their abusers, such as couples counseling, mediation, or family group conferencing.

One avenue to promote the safety and well being of children is to strengthen the self-sufficiency of the non-abusive adult victims. By providing non-abusive parents with resources and support such as TANF, food stamps and affordable housing, service providers increase the likelihood that a child will remain safe and that the victim can permanently leave the abusive situation.

**Children Who Witness
Domestic Violence - CPS:
9.4**

Provide resources for non-abusive parents and support increasing their ability to provide a safe home.



Children Who Witness Domestic Violence - CPS: 9.5

Create protocols and interventions for domestic violence programs to work with the child welfare system to support battered women who maltreat their children.

Domestic violence shelters also serve some women who abuse their children. Shelters need to develop the capacity to work collaboratively with CPS, and simultaneously create responses and make referrals to help abusive and neglectful mothers change their behaviors. These women should not be turned away from services, but instead need to be offered interventions and support. In addition, domestic violence shelters need to ensure safety and protection for maltreated children.

Domestic Relations

Divorce and child custody cases are an opportune time for a batterer to continue to exert power and control tactics over the victim. Judges, court personnel, mediators, psychologists, and domestic relations attorneys frequently come into contact with victims and perpetrators of domestic violence and child abuse. Below are best practices, protocols and procedures for dealing with these cases to ensure both safety for the victim and that the best interests of the children are represented.

Children Who Witness Domestic Violence - Domestic Relations: 9.6

Develop a Bench Book for court personnel pertaining to Arizona's child custody laws and relevant research on domestic relations and child custody.

Bench books have been developed for civil and criminal courts in Arizona by the Committee on the Impact of Domestic Violence and the Courts (CIDVC). These bench books are regularly used by judges to reference laws, protocols and standards for responding to domestic violence cases in their courtrooms. However, neither of these books includes information pertaining to domestic relations issues. Both the civil and criminal bench books should be expanded with new chapters on domestic relations laws, protocols, and best practice standards for these cases.



Safe visitation and exchange locations are critical in domestic relations cases that involve domestic violence. These locations can help to minimize potential conflict and help ensure that visitation and custody orders are abided by.

Children Who Witness Domestic Violence - Domestic Relations: 9.7

Develop the capacity for safe visitation and exchange locations.

In domestic relations cases, custody evaluators make recommendations to judges. Although these recommendations do not bind the court, judges give them substantial weight. Training and protocol standards for evaluations need to be established to ensure that child custody evaluators are prepared to appropriately assess for domestic violence, child abuse or sexual abuse.

Children Who Witness Domestic Violence - Domestic Relations : 9.8

Create training and protocol standards for custody evaluations in order to increase the likelihood that custody decisions are made based on qualified or accurate evaluations.

While there are a number of services available to abuse victims, many times these services fail to respond to the needs of children who are exposed to violence. Children interact with a variety of systems throughout the course of their day - i.e. schools, day care, and youth agencies, all of which can help identify children living with domestic violence. Recommendations in this section are focused on how service providers and systems with which children regularly come into contact respond to the traumatic effects of witnessing and/or experiencing abuse.

Victim Services



Children Who Witness Domestic Violence - Victim Services: 9.9

Create and implement training for judges (including juvenile court), prosecutors, law enforcement officers, and first responders on laws and trauma-related issues surrounding children who witness domestic violence.

All agencies that work with abused children and their families need regular cross-training about the dynamics and impact of domestic violence and child maltreatment, the risks to adult and child victims, the resources available to families, the laws that provide protection, and safety planning information.

Children Who Witness Domestic Violence - Victim Services: 9.10

Develop a continuum of services for children who exhibit behaviors consistent with exposure to or victimization by domestic or sexual violence.

Children who have witnessed domestic violence are at greater risk for emotional and behavioral problems than other children. Currently, neither the child welfare nor behavioral health systems have given this issue priority in the delivery of services to children. A focused coordinated plan as well as policies and procedures need to be developed to get services to these children. As part of this plan, systems need to be developed to provide children in shelter access to health care services.

Children Who Witness Domestic Violence - Victim Services: 9.11

Establish a notification system between law enforcement and schools/day care/youth agencies so that they can respond appropriately when a child has been exposed to domestic or sexual violence in the home.

Schools, day care or youth agencies may be the only place where children can be assessed for exposure to domestic violence. Training is needed for school and other agency personnel to know how to appropriately respond to children who have been exposed to violence in the home. There needs to be a system in which law enforcement automatically notifies schools/day care/youth agencies to inform them of an incident of domestic violence so that teachers and other personnel can appropriately respond to the needs of the child. Confidentiality and safety issues would need to be considered in the development of such a system.

